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ChipMeNot UK Dog Manifesto

The main political parties in the UK, along with several animal charities and vets, have expressed support for compulsory dog chipping. But why? Is there more to it than meets the eye?

The ChipMeNot UK Dog Manifesto explores some of the issues relating to chipping animals and raises some of the questions that need to be put to politicians.

Visit www.ChipMeNot.org.uk for more information.

The Dog Chip Issues:

1. Principle

There is a simple principled argument against chipping: it is not right to implant a foreign body, particularly one that is an electromagnetic transponder, into a living being. A number of people will instinctively understand this without further explanation.

2. Animal testing and normalisation

Chipping animals on such a large scale as is being proposed by compulsory dog chipping amounts to a huge animal testing experiment. Chip companies will look to refine their technology in dogs and normalise the public to their assertion that chipping is safe and serves whatever purpose they choose to market it on. Once they have created a level of acceptance in the public they can then expand chipping into other areas no doubt ending with chipping humans. Chip companies driven by the profit motive will see the human chipping market as big business.

There have been recurrent attempts to introduce mandatory chipping of selected humans in the UK, but these have been defeated either due to public reaction or the fact that the proposals were technically not possible. See the below media articles:

The Guardian 17th November 2002

Surgical tags plan for sex offenders

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2002/nov/17/childrensservices.crime>

The Times 16th July 2006

Police call for tracker chips in paedophiles

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article688425.ece>

The Register 16th July 2006

'Let's track paedos with chip implants' - top cop fails tech test

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/07/16/acpo_jones_paedo_implant/

Independent on Sunday 13th January 2008

Prisoners 'to be chipped like dogs'

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/prisoners-to-be-chipped-like-dogs-769977.html>

Daily Mail 10th April 2008

Met Police officers to be 'microchipped' by top brass in Big Brother style tracking scheme

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-558597/Met-Police-officers-microchipped-brass-Big-Brother-style-tracking-scheme.html#ixzz0m7kah9Pi>

In October 2004 the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of microchip implants in humans for medical purposes. In fact, American firemen, Mexican officials, Alzheimer patients, diabetics, bar patrons, employees, and others have been chipped. In addition, some companies have patents for monitoring humans through the use of chips. Also in 2004 clubbers at the Baja Beach Club in Barcelona were able to pay 125 euros to have a VeriChip implanted in their body so that they could purchase drinks by scanning the chip.

The Register 10th June 2002

First people injected with ID chips, sales drive kicks off

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2002/06/10/first_people_injected_with_id/

United States Patent #20080033273 February 2008

Embedded Bio-Sensor System

<http://tinyurl.com/2w4jjos>

CNN 9th June 2004

Technology gets under clubbers' skin

<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/06/09/spain.club/>

Because the threat of mandatory human micro-chipping is so serious, some US states have already passed laws banning it. These states include Wisconsin, North Dakota, California, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

Ars Technica 4th September 2007

California outlaws the forced subdermal RFID tagging of humans

<http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/news/2007/09/california-outlaws-forced-rfid-tagging-of-humans.ars>

3. Collars and tags are simple and effective / maybe even a tattoo

A collar with a tag is by far the easiest and most effective way of reuniting a dog and its owner. Anyone who can read can use this system. It is so simple, requires no trip to a specialist or electronic equipment. Why are some suddenly suggesting this does not work? If collars break excessively or tags fall off then shouldn't these failings be addressed.

There is already a law in place (Control of Dogs Order 1992) that a dog in a public place must wear a collar with a tag on it so that the owner of the dog can be contacted if the dog is found. If this existing law is not being followed then what reason do supporters of chipping have to believe that people will chip their dogs? In addition, if the current law is not being enforced then what reason do we have to believe that a new chipping law would be enforced any better? This opens up several other issues linked to enforcement discussed below.

If collars and tags really do suffer from an excessive failure rate then why not consider encouraging owners to consider having their dogs tattooed on the inside of their hind legs rather than implanting a chip? Both safe collars with tags and tattoos done humanely are much simpler solutions but of course there is a lot less money to be made by chip manufacturers, chip reader companies and other related businesses.

4. Enforcement

If registration is to be compulsory, then this suggests there are going to be enforcement measures (see 'Previous Policy' below for more information). Enforcement and monitoring therefore needs to be considered part of the overall scheme. Enforcement is likely to become a contentious issue. What happens if a dog does not have a working chip? Would the dog be destroyed? We have heard stories about poor reliability of chips - perhaps up to 30% not functioning correctly.

5. Chip failure

Chips are not a silver bullet. Just because a dog has a chip does not mean that it will work. Chips can fail, can move from their original location or might be missed by someone with a chip reader. Is this failure rate not comparable to the failure of mandatory dog collars and tags?

The July 2004 edition of the US Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA) contained an article detailing the case of Hadden, an American Pit Bull Terrier. According to the article, Hadden slipped out of his collar and ended up at the Animal Shelter in Stafford County, Virginia. He was scanned for a microchip "but the shelter's scanners failed to detect the short-range radio frequency emitted by the dog's microchip." Sadly, Hadden

was put down shortly before his owner arrived at the shelter.

(See 'Pet's Death Rekindles Electronic ID Debate' - <http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/jul04/040701a.asp>)

6. Skewed logic - how on earth could chipping help?

Dog chipping is being offered as the solution to stray dogs, dangerous dogs and irresponsible owners - yet where is the logic to this?

The media hyped issue of dangerous dogs seems to be an inner city problem that is predominantly in London and often on inner city estates. Often people will be fully aware of who the owners of such dogs are. If they do not know who the owners are then how will a chip help? Are we suggesting that someone who is confronted with a vicious dog will just happen to have a chip reading device with them? That they will get close enough to the dog to locate and scan the chip, note down the chip number and then take the number to a vet or dog control warden to report the chip number? Or is it more likely that they will kick the dog and then run away?

See below for a further discussion of responsible ownership and also stray dogs.

7. Health

Whilst supporters of dog chipping claim that the number of dogs with chip-induced tumours is small - the reality is that reliable research and reporting of adverse reactions is only just emerging. Vets often dismiss chips as a cause for cancer, partly as they themselves chip dogs (and make money from it). This has meant that not enough data has been collected by vets and not enough necropsies (post-mortem examinations) have been conducted on pets to fully explore the issue. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem is much worse than chip manufacturers would have the public believe. An adverse animal reaction registry is being set up by ChipMeNot USA and we are working with them.

A Microchip-Cancer report 'Microchip-Induced Tumors in Laboratory Rodents and Dogs: A Review of the Literature 1990-2006' by Katherine Albrecht, Ed.D. can be downloaded at:
<http://www.antichips.com/cancer/index.html>

As evidence emerges that chips can cause cancer then it might be possible to prosecute those that fit chips for causing unnecessary suffering to animals. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 (http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga_20060045_en.pdf) Section 4(3)(b) has a provision that means that should chipping become compulsory then the suffering will be state sanctioned and so those that fit chips cannot

be prosecuted, the Act states:

"4 Unnecessary suffering

(1) A person commits an offence if—

- (a) an act of his, or a failure of his to act, causes an animal to suffer,
- (b) he knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act, or failure to act, would have that effect or be likely to do so,
- (c) the animal is a protected animal, and
- (d) the suffering is unnecessary.

[...]

(3) The considerations to which it is relevant to have regard when determining for the purposes of this section whether suffering is unnecessary include—

- (a) whether the suffering could reasonably have been avoided or reduced;
- (b) whether the conduct which caused the suffering was in compliance with any relevant enactment or any relevant provisions of a licence or code of practice issued under an enactment;"**

This means that the compulsory chipping of dogs will actually grant immunity from prosecution!

8. Responsible ownership cannot be legislated into existence

It is not possible to create responsible owners via legislation. Anyone that believes this can be done does not understand what responsible ownership entails. Governments increasingly want to control all elements of peoples' lives and are no longer satisfied with their role of administering the nation's infrastructure. The media play their part in calling for the state to "do something" and an increasingly infantilised public all too often fall into line. *Responsibility cannot be state sanctioned - only obedience and fear can be state sanctioned. As a society we need to work together to improve our lives.*

9. The problem with compulsion

Compulsion removes choice and responsibility. If dog chipping is compulsory then owners will no longer investigate the pros and cons of chipping or the effects on a pets health. In other words they will no longer act as a responsible owner should. Compulsion will actually legislate AGAINST responsible ownership. Unthinking obedience is not the same as responsible ownership.

10. Chip company profits

Micro-chipping is a big business and there are huge profits to be made. The chip companies who are promoting the dog chipping agenda are not honest brokers and many of the veterinary corporations and dog charities that are in favour of dog chipping also stand to make money from chipping dogs. Consideration must be given to the profit motive that is pushing this agenda forwards.

11. Dogs Trust figures on strays

A 2007 press release from the Dogs Trust revealed that the number of stray dogs in the UK fell by 25% between 1997 and 2007 without such extreme measures being introduced and the Control of Dogs Order 1992 already creates an offence of a dog in a public space not wearing a collar and name tag.

12. Environmental impact

In an age when we are being asked to consider the environmental impact of our lifestyle how can introducing dog chipping make sense? What is the environmental impact of every microchip, the readers, the batteries for each reader, the computers to administer the database and so on. Yet we all know that we will be repeatedly told that we must install energy saving light bulbs to save the planet!

In addition to dogs many other animals are now being micro-chipped, including fish. As a result birds are now eating fish that have been chipped. This is a health risk not only for birds but also for any animal that eats an animal implanted with a microchip. It is also an environmental problem. According to Scott Bettin, a freshwater fisheries biologist with the Bonneville Power Administration in the US: "Caspian Terns eat the tagged salmon and then [excrete] them onto their nests. These islands glisten with RFID [Radio Frequency Identification] tags."

13. Previous policy - specific, targeted sanctions, not generalised surveillance

The option of compulsory dog registration was considered in 1988, when the previous dog licences were abolished. The government of the day wanted to do something about dangerous dogs, and the issue of licenses was included in the review. At that time, Labour was in favour of compulsory dog registration (it was a commitment in their 1987 election manifesto). The Conservative government decided that this would be too heavy handed and

unpopular, and quite irrelevant to the issue of controlling problem dogs and owners. Instead, the government opted against registration, to abolish licenses (which only about 50% of owners purchased anyway) and to introduce targeted legislation and enforcement against problem dogs and owners.

A paper on this issue by the House of Commons Library is available at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp98/rp98-006.pdf>

14. Parliamentary support ?

The plans for dog chipping are presented as being widely supported, yet an Early Day Motion (EDM) tabled in parliament in May 2009 calling for compulsory chipping (EDM 1487) attracted the signatures of just 51 MPs, whereas EDM 1111 welcoming the arrival of two peregrine falcons to the Palace of Westminster received 52 signatures!